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# *VAIS, VAS, M'AS* IN CANADIAN FRENCH: A SOCIOHISTORICAL STUDY

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Paper presented at NWAV-16, held at The University of Texas at Austin, Oct. 23-25, 1987

93-00625/

# *VAIS, VAS, M'AS* IN CANADIAN FRENCH: A SOCIOHISTORICAL STUDY*

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## Introduction

The present study will delve into the history of a case of variation in the verbal morphology of contemporary Canadian French, with special reference to the local French spoken in the city of Welland, Ontario. The variable, binary or ternary depending on its syntactic function (i.e. main verb vs auxiliary of the periphrastic future), involves the alternate forms of the verbs *aller* 'go' and *s'en aller* 'go, leave' in the 1sg. ind. pres., the *vais* forms (e.g. *j'vais, j'm'en vais*), the *vas* forms (e.g. *j'vas, j'm'en vas, m'en vas*) and the *m'as* forms (e.g. *j'm'as, m'as*). Quantitative evidence will be provided showing that the *vas* forms, which date back to precolonial (i.e. preseventeenth century) French and were then socially unmarked (i.e. used by a wide spectrum of French society including the aristocracy), have by and large retained their lack of social marking in contemporary Canadian French. This is in sharp contrast with the current status of the *vas* forms in France, where they have been replaced by the prescribed *vais* forms in cultivated speech and survive only in popular or rural speech. The *m'as* forms, on the other hand, whose etymology is still uncertain and which are used exclusively in the function of auxiliary of the periphrastic future (e.g. *m'as le faire* 'I'm going to do it'), will be shown, again on the basis of quantitative evidence, to be confined to the speech of lower-class uneducated French Canadians. In the absence of historical attestation of this form in precolonial French and for that matter in contemporary French,[1] the question will be raised whether we might be dealing with a French-Canadian neologism. While this possibility cannot be entirely ruled out, the observation that /ma/ is a preverbal marker of the future in French-based Creoles in both the Caribbean and Indian Ocean leads one to hypothesize that *m'as* must have been present in precolonial French, and more specifically in the popular or rural language judging by its present-day social distribution in Canadian French. The study will thus illustrate the fact that a comparative examination of sociolinguistic data on contemporary Canadian French and other colonial varieties of French (including French-based Creoles) can, owing to their conservative nature, provide insights into the popular French of the precolonial period about which still relatively little is known given that the sources which up until now have been exploited by language

historians are either literary texts or the observations of prescriptive grammarians on the speech of the bourgeoisie or aristocracy (see Trudgill 1986 for a similar view on the value of colonial varieties of English). Sociohistorical explanations will be offered for the differential diachronic evolution of Canadian and European French with respect to the variable under study (but which also account for the retention in Canadian French of many other features that have either become stigmatized or disappeared in European French).

**The variable**

Whether they function as main (i.e. motion) verbs or as auxiliaries of the periphrastic future, *aller* and *s'en aller* present alternating forms in the 1sg. ind. pres. as shown in the examples below:[2]

(1) a. *J'vais* sur la parenté au Québec (W40-5700)
'I go to my relatives in Quebec'
b. *J'vas* à l'église (W53-3810)
'I go to church'
c. *J'vais* t'dire une chose (W46-5630)
'I'm going to tell you something'
d. *J'vas* y aller mais qu'i' fasse beau (W55-4160)
'I'm going to go there as soon as it's nice'

(2) a. *J'm'en vais* à Ottawa (W54-6780)
'I'm going to Ottawa'
b. *J'm'en vas* à une assemblée (W53-4820)
'I'm going to an assembly'
c. *J'm'en vais* vous dire pourquoi (W54-6240)
'I'm going to tell you why'
d. *J'm'en vas* y aller (W58-2500)
'I'm going to go there'

It can be pointed out that *s'en aller* (but not *aller*) was occasionally used (4 times out of 25) without an overt subject pronoun, be its function that of main verb or auxiliary. When so used, *s'en aller* was always conjugated with the *vas* form:

(3) a. *M'en vas* à 'église pour faire ma religion (W05-335)
'I go to church to do my religion'
b. *M'en vas* dire comme y'en a qui disent (W54-1290)
'I'm going to say as there are some who say'

In the auxiliary function there exists yet a third and quite unique variant, namely *m'as* or more rarely *j'm'as* (7 tokens out of 71):

(4) a. Ben *m'as* dire comme on dit (W57-2570)
'Well I'm going to say as one says'
b. *M'as* aller à 'beach (W58-3020)
'I'm going to go to the beach'

c. J'sais pas si *j'm'as* prendre des vacances (W10-336)
'I don't know if I'm going to take any vacation'

It is important to stress here that what we are interested in is conjugation with *vais* or *vas*, verb type and function being considered as possible linguistic constraints (see dual scaling and variable rule analyses further). The variable, then, because of the strict morphological grounds on which we have defined it, obviates the problem of occasional lack of semantic equivalence between *aller* (which always means 'go') and *s'en aller* (which sometimes means 'leave'). The *m'as* variant, however, poses a problem of classification as it is not obviously a conjugated form of either *aller* or *s'en aller*. In the historical section that follows we will present evidence justifying its treatment as a separate variant.

**History**

The variation between *vas* and*vais* as conjugated forms of *aller* and *s'en aller* in the 1sg. dates back at least to the Middle French period (Fouché 1967). Both verbs were pressed into service as auxiliaries of the periphrastic future during this same period and were used interchangeably (see Gougenheim 1971 for a detailed account of this development). Fouché and others look upon *vas* as the result of a process of analogical regularization based on the 2sg. and 3sg. forms *vas* and *va* (phonetically identical).[3] *Vais* is also said to be rooted in a process of regularization, having operated however across paradigms on the analogy of *avoir*: 1sg. *ai*, 2sg. *as* and 3sg. *a* (Fouché 1967). It would seem then that both *vas* and *vais* were innovations, the historical form being *vois* (< VL **vao*).[4] The latter did not survive past the 17th c. and its demise appears to have been accelerated by the prescriptive grammarians, who considered it archaic. The rivalry, then, was henceforth reduced to *vas* vs *vais*. Two well-known prescriptive grammarians commented on this case of variation. Vaugelas (1647/1981:54) remarked:

> Tous ceux qui savent écrire et qui ont étudié disent *je vais*, et disent fort bien selon la grammaire qui conjugue ainsi ce verbe *je vais, tu vas, il va*; car lorsque chaque personne est différente de l'autre, en matière de conjugaison, c'est la richesse et la beauté de la langue, parce qu'il y a moins d'équivoques dont les langues pauvres abondent. Mais toute la cour dit *je va* et ne peut souffrir *je vais*, qui passe pour un mot provincial ou du peuple de Paris.

Ménage (1673), however, had a quite different perception (quoted in Fouché 1967:426):

> M. de Vaugelas veut qu'on dise *je va* et soûtient qu'on parle ainsi à la Cour; il faut dire *vais* et

> c'est comme on parle à la Cour. *Je vais, tu vas...* c'est ainsi que ce verbe se doit conjuguer. Et non pas *je va, tu vas, il vat* comme le conjuguent les Bourguignons selon le témoignage de Bèze... Messieurs de Port Royal qui disoient autrefois *je va* trompez par la remarque de M. de Vaugelas s'en sont depuis corrigez et disent aussi présentement *je vais*. M. de Vaugelas lui-même qui veut qu'on dise *va* a dit le plus souvent *vais*...

These two quotes document an interesting case of change in progress involving the status of *je vas* in the course of the 17th c. Once used by both the common people and the aristocracy, this form was now losing ground to *je vais* in the speech of the latter as the result of the promotional efforts of grammarians like Ménage who considered *vais*, on linguistic grounds, the one and only correct form. However, *je vas* was to prove difficult to eradicate since it lingered more or less until the early 19th c. in "distinguished" French (Grevisse 1986:1247). In 1835 the French Académie decreed that *vas* was rare and colloquial. Nowadays, in France, *vas* is relegated to popular or rural speech (Rey 1986:259; Grevisse 1986:1247) and has acquired the status of a stereotype.

*M'as*, on the other hand, is nowhere to be found in the various sources on popular French, past or present, nor is it reported in the dictionaries or other descriptive works on the regional dialects or local patois of France (see the Glossaire du parler français au Canada 1968:444). Could it be an innovation of Canadian French? The answer is most probably *no* since it is present in most of the French-based creoles of the Caribbean and Indian Ocean (Goodman 1964:87) — although, curiously enough, it is not attested in Acadian French or its off-shoot Cajun French (Chaudenson 1986). Thus it would seem more plausible to postulate the existence of a common ancestor form **m'as* in the colloquial speech of the 17th c. immigrants who took part in French colonial expansion than to posit independent parallel evolutions.[5] There remains to explain the fact that **m'as* has escaped attestation. The most plausible explanation is that because of its popular origin (see below for historical evidence) **m'as* would not have been targeted by the prescriptive grammarians, concerned as they were about standardizing educated speech, not popular speech.

The etymology of *m'as* remains rather enigmatic. The most commonly held view — actually the only serious one proposed thus far, at least to our knowledge — is that it represents a morphophonemic reduction of *(je) m'en vas* > *(je) m'en 'as* [via disarticulation of intervocalic *v* ] > *(je) m'as* [via vowel fusion], both phonological rules being independently motivated (see Juneau 1976:85). It is clear, however, that we

are dealing here with a historical process of reduction and that synchronically speaking, *(je) m'as* must be analyzed as an amalgam which has lost its ties with the full form *(je) m'en vas* from which it is putatively derived. The fact that the frequency of occurrence of *(je) m'as* (71 tokens) by far outweighs that of *(je) m'en vas* (5 tokens only in the auxiliary function) also motivates ascribing it independent status. Moreover, the above-mentioned fact that *m'as* is only sporadically used with an overt subject pronoun suggests as well that it is a base form and that *j'm'as* is to be accounted for by a rule of subject pronoun insertion.

This account leaves a number of questions unresolved, however. First, why would the contraction of *(je) m'en vas* to *(je) m'as* only have taken place in the auxiliary function?

(5) a. **M'as* à Montréal
'I'm gonna Montreal'
b. **J'm'as* à la maison
'I'm gonna home'

Second, why would it only have taken place in the 1sg. and not in the other person-number combinations?[6]

(6) a. *(Tu)*t'as* à Montréal
'You're gonna Montreal'
b. *(Il)*s'a* à la maison
'He's gonna home'

Third, following Hull (1979:175), how does one reconcile the above account with the fact that *m'as* implies the application of pro-dropping at a rate far in excess of the normal rate — the latter evidenced by the frequency relationship of *m'en vas* to *j'm'en va(i)s* (see above)?[7]

In answer to the first question one could appeal to the oft-made observation that the syntactic function of main verb seems to be more conservative as regards linguistic change than is the auxiliary function (see Cheshire 1982). More specifically, the fact that the auxiliary slot is unstressed would favor morphophonemic reduction.

An answer to the second is suggested by Gougenheim's (1971:97-110) detailed study of the rise of the periphrastic future in French. The use of *(s'en) aller* + infinitive to indicate futurity originated in popular speech and gained currency during the 15th c. It also had strong expressive force, that is, *was overwhelmingly concentrated in the 1sg.* This great preponderance of the 1sg. lasted well into the following century. There was thus a time span of two centuries during which *(je) m'en vas* could have undergone morphophonemic reduction to *(je) m'as*. It must be assumed that when periphrasis finally generalized to the other

person-number combinations (apparently during the 17th c. when the construction was approved by the prescriptive grammarians and also extended to future in the past, e.g. *j'allais mourir* 'I was going to die'), the reduction process was no longer operative.

As concerns the third question, an answer to it could possibly be sought through a closer examination of the rise of obligatory subject pronouns in French. The great synchronic preponderance of *m'as* over *j'm'as* suggests that *m'as* derives directly from *m'en vas* rather than *j'm'en vas*, a later rule of pro-insertion accounting for *j'm'as* as was postulated above. There is historical evidence that the periphrastic future dates back at least to the 14th c., at which time the use of subject pronouns was not yet compulsory. It is possible then that *m'en vas* would have been the rule and *j'm'en vas* the exception in the course of the development of the periphrastic future. If we are to go by the copious examples cited by Gougenheim, however, *je* was categorically present in the very earliest popular literary texts.[8]

To conclude the discussion concerning *m'as*, the above outstanding questions still need to be answered more satisfactorily than we have been able to here before Juneau's etymological account can be accepted definitively.

**Synchrony**

We will now examine the sociolinguistic status of *vais*, *vas* and *m'as* in contemporary Canadian French and then discuss the results in the light of the historical facts that we have just seen concerning this case of variation. The only other quantitative study of this variable besides ours seems to be that of Deshaies, Martin and Noël (1981) which was centred on the informal speech of Quebec City adolescents resident in two neighbourhoods, one lower class, the other middle class. Restricting their observations to the auxiliary context, where all three variants alternate (see above), and not differentiating between *aller* and *s'en aller*, they found the following order of frequency: *vas* (75%), *m'as* (20%) and *vais* (5%). They concluded from the extreme infrequency of *vais* that this variant is in all likelihood a marker of more formal style. Furthermore, as far as they could tell without doing a formal statistical analysis of their data, *vas* and *m'as* were evenly distributed between the two neighbourhoods. In other words, neither form seemed to have particular social connotations.

Let us see to what extent these findings are corroborated by our quantitative examination of the social distribution of *vais*, *vas* and *m'as* in Welland French. Beforehand, however, we need to briefly familiarize the reader with the French-speaking community of Welland, Ontario. The community was

formed only relatively recently as the result of the immigration of French-Canadians from the province of Québec, its beginnings only going back to World War I. They came predominantly from rural areas attracted by the prospect of finding work in Welland's industries. Over the years the community has become bilingual in English, the language of the local and provincial majority, and is now showing signs of shifting to that language (see Beniak, Mougeon and Valois 1985 and Mougeon and Beniak, to appear, for a fuller account of this community).

The analysis proceeded in two stages: first we did an exploratory dual scaling analysis of the data, followed by a confirmatory variable rule analysis. We used the VARBRUL programme in its microcomputer-adapted version.[9]

*The dual scaling analysis*

The data were arranged in a matrix in which rows correspond to individual occurrences of the variable and columns correspond to factor groups. The matrix submitted to the dual scaling analysis had 451 entries and 8 factor groups. Each entry is an occurrence of the variable. The factor groups refer to personal characteristics of the speaker (age, sex, education, social class,[10] degree of bilingualism), to features of the linguistic context (syntactic function, type of verb) and to the variants of the variable. Three solutions were obtained that together explain almost 41% of the variance. The interpretation of each solution is based on the information given by: a) the factor group statistics where R(jt) indicates the extent to which factor group j is correlated with the test, and b) the matrix of inter-factor group correlation. The results of the dual scaling analysis are graphically represented in Figure 1 (see Appendix). The large circles encompass those factors that are significantly correlated with a particular variant. The ragged ovals within the large circles indicate significant inter-factor correlations.

Solution 1 explains 16% of the variance. *Education* is the most relevant factor group for solution 1 with an R(jt) of .7976. Figure 1 shows indeed the proximity of *m'as* and *elementary* on the one hand and of *vais* and *postsecondary* on the other. As far as the *vas* form is concerned, its <u>non</u> proximity to *postsecondary* suggests that educated speakers are less likely to use this variant. The matrix of inter-factor group correlation shows a correlation of .46 between the factor groups *education* and *social class*. Indeed *high* social class and *postsecondary* education are clustered together as one would expect, but it doesn't seem that education and social class are inter-correlated at the lower ends since *elementary* and *secondary* are roughly equidistant on the graph from *low* and *mid*. This suggests that *social class* is dispensable as a factor group (or alternatively

that it could be made into a finer scale by combining *occupation* and *education*).

Solution 2 explains 13.3% of the variance. The relevant factor groups for solution 2 are *age* (R(jt) = .7664), *education* (R(jt) = .7581) and *bilingualism* (R(jt) = .4570). The first two factor groups are inter-correlated in the matrix of inter-item correlation (.51). In the graph two distinct clusters appear: *elementary* and *old*, *postsecondary* and *young adult*. Furthermore, although *age* and *bilingualism* are not strongly correlated overall (.22), it remains that *French-dominant* and *old*, and *English-dominant* and *young adults* are closely associated on the graph.

Solution 3 explains 11.41% of the variance. The relevant factor group here is *social class* (R(jt) = .7021). Examining the graph, we notice that *vais* and *high* are very close. Perhaps this tells us that instead of doing away with *social class* we should, as mentioned above, refine this factor group by amalgamating it with *education*.

In summary, the dual scaling analysis suggests that the forms *m'as* and *vais* can be assigned to two diametrically opposed groups of speakers. *M'as* is associated with old, uneducated, low or mid class, French-dominant adults while *vais* on the contrary is associated with young, educated, high class, English-dominant adults. *Vas* appears to be rather more socially diffused than either *m'as* or *vais* without for all that being unstratified since the *vais* users tend to avoid it just as they do *m'as*, but to a lesser extent.

*The variable rule analysis*
We will see now if the patterns in the data uncovered by the dual scaling analysis are confirmed by the VARBRUL analysis. First we examined the alternation between *vais* and *vas* as main verbs, then *vais*, *vas* and *m'as* as auxiliaries. The results of the two analyses are respectively presented in Tables 1 and 2 in the Appendix.

Table 1 evidences the very high degree to which the *vas* form is present in the informal speech of Welland Francophones in the function of main or motion verb (as reflected in the input term of .94). Moreover, it shows that *vas* is statistically evenly distributed between the two verbs *aller* and *s'en aller* and among the various speaker categories excepting the three educational groups. The higher the educational level attained, the lower the probability of using *vas*. Be that as it may, the low effects (.11 and .35) assigned to the factors secondary and postsecondary education should not conceal the fact that the speakers with these levels of education used *vas* no less than 63% and 88% of the time respectively!

It should be noted that, strictly speaking, the results in

Table 1 cannot be compared with Deshaies et al.'s as theirs were based on the auxiliary context, to which we now turn.

The results displayed in Table 2 were generated by a multinomial version of the VARBRUL programme. While this programme provides factor effects which, upon visual inspection, can provide clues as to which factor groups might have predictive value, it does not incorporate a stepwise regression method. However, by transforming the variable into binary alternations successively contrasting one of the variants against the others, it is then possible to use the binomial version of the VARBRUL programme to assess the contribution of the various factor groups.

Looking at the factor effects in Table 2, one can note that *vas* appears to be evenly distributed across speaker groups as indicated by the smallness of the spread between the effects within each factor group, with the probable exception of the factor group sex where the effect of F on probability of use of *vas* is more than double that of M. A subsequent binomial analysis of *vas* vs the other two variants combined confirmed the lack of contribution of all of the factor groups excepting sex (see Table 3 in Appendix).

If we look now at the effects associated with *vais* or *m'as*, the spread between the factor effects is of considerable magnitude in each factor group and hence the necessity to statistically assess their predictive power. The results of the binomial analysis of *vais* vs the other two variants combined (*vas* and *m'as*) again selected the factor group sex, female speakers using *vais* significantly less often than male speakers (see Table 4 in Appendix). It also selected education, social class and bilingualism but inconsistently, that is only on the step-up or step-down. We suspect that the alternative selection of education and social class is due to their being overlapping factor groups (see dual scaling results above).[11] The factor effects in Table 2 indicate the nature of the correlations between *vais* usage and educational level or social class. The speakers who have attained the highest educational level and, similarly, those who belong to the highest social class, have the highest probability of using *vais*. In fact, closer inspection of the levels of significance associated with the contribution of each factor group on the step-up and step-down shows that education and social class are actually better predictors than is sex. As concerns the factor group bilingualism, the fact that it was selected only on the step-down part of the VARBRUL analysis incites one to be prudent concerning its contribution to predicting *vais* usage. Nonetheless the relationship is as follows: the better the knowledge of English, the higher the probability of using *vais*.

The binomial analysis of *m'as* vs *vais* and *vas* combined

yielded analogous results (see Table 5 in Appendix). Only two factor groups were consistently selected on both the step-up and step-down, namely sex and social class, female and especially higher class speakers showing a sharp tendency not to use *m'as*. Indeed the high class speakers almost completely "avoid" *m'as*. The three other factor groups were also selected but inconsistently, education patterning like social class, age being linearly related to use of *m'as* and bilingualism being inversely related to its use.

**Discussion**

To anyone familiar with French, the findings concerning the variable under study are startling to say the least. It will be recalled (see historical section) that *vas* is a stereotype of lower-class or rural speech in France. Even when adopting a casual style of speech no educated Frenchman would use *vas* instead of *vais* (as main or auxiliary verb).[12] In Canadian French (i.e. Québécois French and its offshoots), on the contrary, *vas* is in widespread use, showing only gradient correlations with educational level (when it functions as a motion verb) and with sex (when it functions as an auxiliary). Thus the social distribution of *vas* in Welland French is reminiscent of its distribution in the French of Quebec City adolescents, where it was basically even. However, because of our quantitative statistical approach, we have been able to detect the more subtle social correlations of *vas*.[13]

The changing social correlations of *vas* depending on whether it functions as motion verb or auxiliary of the future is certainly noteworthy. It seems to fall out directly from the fact that in the auxiliary function there is three-way variation, the less educated speakers shifting to *m'as* in that function where they would have opted for *vas* in the main verb function, thereby lowering their frequency of use of *vas* and bringing it more in line with the educated speakers', which is a consistent 63% (compare row 1 in Tables 1 and 2). A related explanation can be proposed for the association of auxiliary *vas* with female speakers: the male speakers show a greater shift to *m'as* and hence their use of *vas* is lowered.

*M'as* stands in even sharper contrast to French usage than *vas* since it isn't even found in the popular or rural speech of France. We saw that *m'as*, unlike *vas*, evidences very sharp social stratification. As such it is not surprising that the female speakers were found to use non-standard *m'as* significantly less often than the male speakers, a by now well established sociolinguistic pattern. That *m'as* is also positively associated with old, French-dominant speakers also makes a lot of sense when considered in the light of earlier findings of ours which reveal that the rise of bilingualism and linguistic assimilation among the younger Franco-Ontarian generations entails an increased importance of the minority

language schools as a locus of transmission of French (that is, Standard French) and hence a more or less important break with the traditional vernacular. The fact that the younger generations are more educated than the old also favors the loss of salient non-standard features such as *m'as*.

The marginal status of *vais* in Canadian French in both main verb and auxiliary functions represents another marked difference with French. Indeed, it is striking that a form that is considered standard usage is only variably used one third of the time by the most educated or high class speakers of Welland French. This finding would seem to lend support to the claim of Deshaies et al. that in Canadian French *vais* is probably relegated to formal styles and hence to domains such as the school. This would explain in turn *vais'* connection with English-dominant bilingualism. As to the unexpected association of *vais* with male speakers, we find it puzzling and at this stage are without a plausible explanation for it.

The key to explaining these important cross-dialectal differences between Canadian and European French lies, we think, in a consideration of the sociolinguistic status of *vais*, *vas* and *m'as* in precolonial French and of several aspects of the history of France and French Canada which have differentially affected the status and spread of the educated norm (see Corbeil 1976). The reader will recall that in the 17th c. *vas* was still largely socially unmarked, used as it was by the common people as well as by the aristocracy, *vais* had started to make some inroads in educated speech and *m'as* was probably a typical feature of popular speech. Since colonization of New France took place precisely during that century and came to a stop at the end of it (Barbaud 1984), New World French simply inherited this particular sociolinguistic situation. Those who could have played a role in the diffusion of the standard of the time and hence of the incipient normative variant *vais* at the expense of *vas* and *m'as* and its transmission to future generations by providing models of speech which featured *vais*, namely the nobility, for the most part returned to France shortly after the British Conquest of 1760. Relations between the colony and France were severed and the settlers (for the most part of rural or popular backgrounds) were largely left on their own. If we add to this reduction in social stratification that formal education remained up until very recently underdeveloped in Quebec (Corbeil 1976), we can understand better why *m'as* did not get eradicated from the speech of the lower classes as it must have in France and why *vas* still has a strong foothold in the speech of the educated classes here. Furthermore, it has been observed by several authors quoted in Gagné (1980) that there is still a significant discrepancy between what French-Canadian teachers say should be said (e.g. *vais*) and what they actually variably say themselves (e.g. *vas*), a behavior which is not out of line with the absence of sharp social stratification found with

respect to *vas*.

**Conclusion**

The present study has illustrated the fact that if an examination of 17th c. French can throw some light on the starting point of French in the New World, it has obvious limitations since as has been pointed out by Valli (n.d.) the historical sources that have been exploited by grammarians or language historians are mostly literary works. The value of the colonial varieties of French including Canadian French is that they constitute a potentially rich and still underused source of information on the history of spoken French given their high degree of conservatism. Poirier (1985) makes a similar point regarding the contribution of research on the vocabulary of Québécois French to historical French lexicology. Colonial varieties of French, then, could constitute an important element in the development of what Valli (n.d.) has called a "sociolinguistic history" of French. That Romaine (1982) has made a similar call in relation to the history of English is perhaps symptomatic of a more general dissatisfaction which sociolinguists experience when they want to delve into the history of the contemporary varieties of spoken language that they are studying, only to find that the work of language historians is but of limited value to them.

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*We wish to gratefully acknowledge the support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. We also extend our thanks to Suzanne Romaine and André Valli for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

[1] When used alone, the word *French* will refer to the variety of French spoken in France. We will also occasionally refer to this variety as *European French*.

[2] The examples are taken from our speech corpus. The alphanumeric code following each example identifies the speaker and the line number of the example in the interview transcript.

[3] It is interesting to note that the analogical process which historically gave rise to 1sg.*vas* can still be observed today in child language (Clark, in press; Martinet 1969:96) and in the interlanguage of L2 learners (Harley and Swain 1978:55). But as Deshaies and Noël (1981:416) point out, De la Chaussée (1977) has rightly wondered why, if 1sg. *vas* was formed by analogy with 2sg. *vas* and 3sg. *va*, 1sg. **as* wasn't formed from 2sg. *as* and 3sg. *a* in the case of *avoir* 'have'? By the same token, we may ask, along with Frei (1929:32), why 1sg. **es* is not attested for the 1sg. pres. ind. of *être* 'be',

given the possible analogy with 2sg. *es* and 3sg. *est*? To be perfectly accurate, analogical 1sg. *as* and *es* are sporadically attested in popular varieties of French. Deshaies and Noël report one occurrence of *j'as* in the speech of Quebec City adolescents resident in a working-class neighborhood; similarly, Frei himself (p. 163) noted episodic occurrences of *j'as* and *j'es* in his corpus of popular European French. Yet both these regularized forms are once again typical of 1rst and 2nd language acquisition. One explanation would be to hypothesize that analogical regularizations are blocked from vernacularizing not only when, as Martinet (1969) put it, the irregularity to which they would normally apply is highly recurrent and hence stable through time (which is the case for *suis* and *ai*, *être* and *avoir* being the two most frequent verbs, respectively 4 and 3 times more frequent than *aller* judging for example by Beauchemin et al's 1983 frequency list), but also when the irregularity, if regularized, would produce intolerable ambiguity. One can immediately appreciate what the analogical regularization of 1sg. *suis* 'am' would entail if it became accepted adult usage, namely a form **es* entirely homophonous with 1sg. *ai*: /e/. In other words, the phonetic sequence /ze/ would become ambiguous between 'I am' and 'I have'. Interestingly enough, no ambiguity would result if the analogical regularization of 1sg. *suis* and *ai* proceeded sequentially, applying first to *ai* then to *suis*. However, there is no reason to expect such an ordering as there is only a slight difference in frequency between the two verbs (in favor of *être*) again going by Beauchemin et al.'s list.

[4] There were in fact still other forms of *aller* in the 1sg. ind. pres. as pointed out to us by Valli (p.c.), but according to Brunot (1909:317) these were probably just orthographic variants of *vais* (e.g. *vay*), of *vois* (e.g. *voy*) and of *vas* (e.g. *va*) (see also Huguet 1925:165-6). In any case, Brunot confirms Fouché's view that by the 17th c. only two variants remained: *vais* and *vas*.

[5] We are careful to use the word "speech" here rather than "French" in order not to prejudge what is still a quite controversial debate, that of the precise origins of New World French (see Barbaud 1984 for the most recent and systematic attempt at settling this issue "une fois pour toutes" 'once and for all' as the author says). The fact of the matter is that the question is still very much open. Experts continue to disagree over whether the 17th c. immigrants from France, most of whom were provincials (e.g. Normans, Poitevins, etc.) already knew French (i.e. the

central Ile-de-France dialect, in its popular guise to be sure) or whether they were still in their large majority patois speakers who then underwent linguistic assimilation into the French-speaking group, which though in the minority, was nevertheless dominant in terms of power and control over the affairs of the budding colony.

[6] *T'as* has been reported alongside *m'as* in the local French of Old Mines, Missouri, apparently an off-shoot of early eighteenth century Québécois French (Thogmartin 1979). While this might mean that the parent dialect once had *t'as*, a more plausible explanation is that of Louisiana Creole influence.

[7] French of course is not a pro-drop language. However, when pro-dropping does occur it seems to be mostly in the 1sg. of reflexive verbs. For instance, Valli (n.d.) cites such examples of subject pronoun omission as *m'en fous* 'I don't care' and *veux pas le savoir* 'I don't want to know' in popular French. This was confirmed by a quick search conducted on our own speech corpus which revealed further examples confined to the 1sg. such as *me souviens* 'I remember', *m'en prive pas* 'I don't deprive myself', *m'en rappelle* 'I remember', etc. However, the search also confirmed the infrequency of pro-dropping in this context thus making it an implausible explanation of the numerical superiority of *m'as* over *j'm'as*.

[8] Alexander Hull (p.c.) has indicated to us his suspicion that *m'as* may be disguised under the full written form *je m'en vas*. An analogous case in contemporary French would be *il y a* 'there is' which is pronounced *ya* in speech but never represented as such in writing. The ideal historical sources (if they exist) would not be literary representations of popular speech (since these will always show more or less important adaptations to standard orthography) but actual samples of popular writing.

[9] We would like to take this opportunity to thank Walter Cichocki for helping us run the dual scaling program and graph and interpret the results. We also are indebted to Susan Pintzuk for kindly making the IBM PC version of the VARBRUL programme available to us and for providing useful guidance regarding its use.

[10] Social class membership was established on the basis of occupational prestige; we divided the social class scale

into three groups: high, mid and low.

[11] To test this out, we propose in the future to run two additional binomial analyses excluding each overlapping factor group in turn. The results will indicate whether education and occupation are each predictors of *vais* when considered in the absence of the other.

[12] We unfortunately are not familiar with any quantitative study that could back this claim. We are relying here on our intuitions as educated native speakers of European French and on the repeated allusions in the literature to *vas* as a feature of popular or rural speech in France (Frei 1971:32, 163; Martinet 1969:96; Rey 1986:259; etc.).

[13] On the other hand, it could be argued that the young age of the Quebec City speakers (10-17 year-olds) is a factor which favors homogeneity of the vernacular given the fact that they have not yet taken their place in the linguistic market and so are under no real pressure to conform to the adult middle-class norm of speech (which in any case, as we have seen, is only quantitatively rather than qualitatively different from the speech norms of the lower-class groups).

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**Appendix**

Figure 1. Graphical display of dual scaling analysis

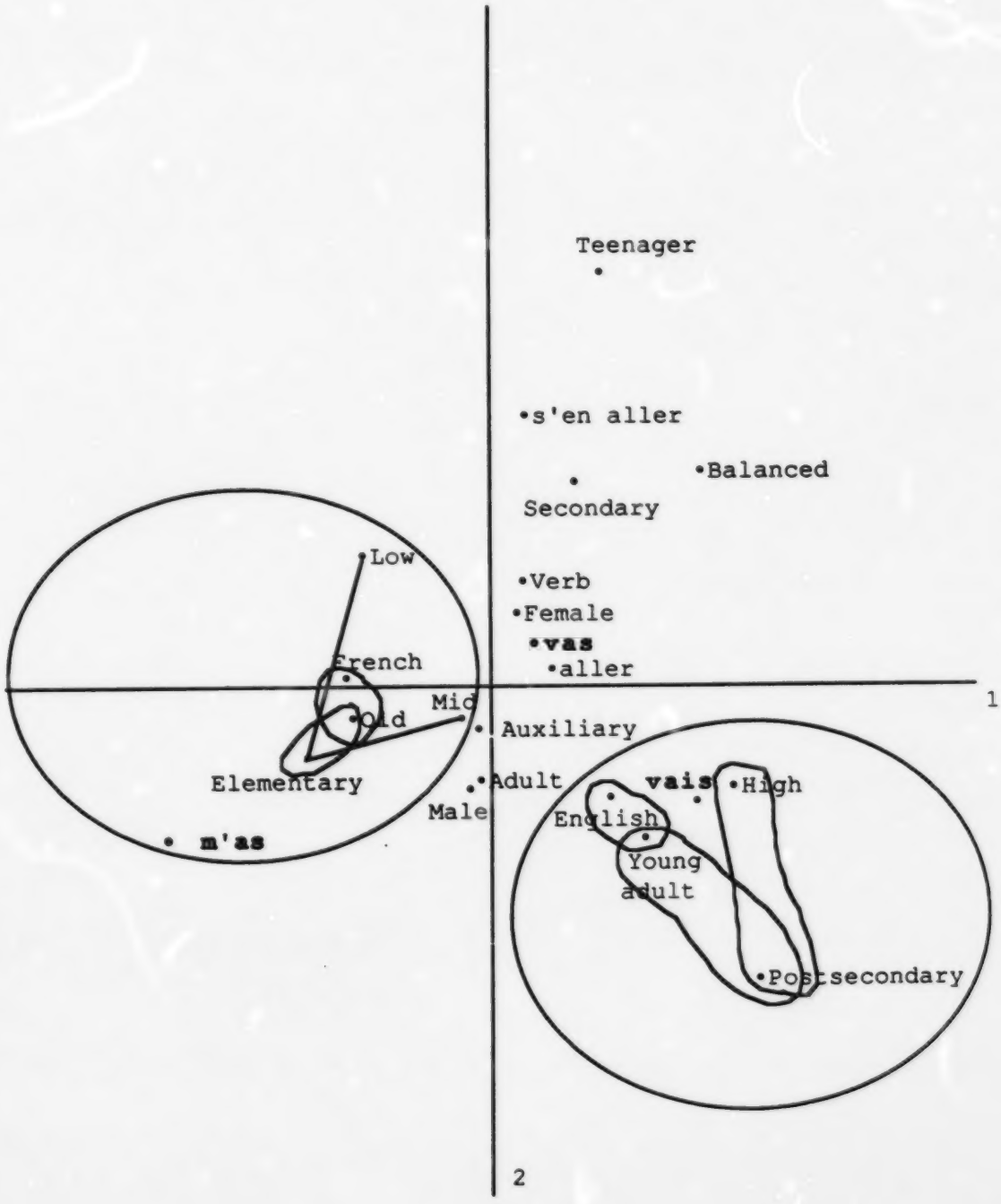

Table 1. VARBRUL analysis of *vais* vs *vas* as main verbs

| Factor groups | N of *vais* | N of *vas* | Total | % vas | Factor effects Step-up | Step-down |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Education* | | | | | | |
| Postsecondary | 7 | 12 | 19 | 63% | .11 | .11 |
| Secondary | 6 | 43 | 49 | 88% | .35 | .35 |
| Elementary | 2 | 70 | 72 | 97% | .72 | .72 |
| *Age* | | | | | | |
| 55+ | 3 | 49 | 52 | 94% | | |
| 35-54 | 2 | 30 | 32 | 94% | not | not |
| 20-34 | 6 | 23 | 29 | 79% | sign. | sign. |
| 14-19 | 4 | 23 | 27 | 85% | | |
| *Sex* | | | | | | |
| F | 7 | 76 | 83 | 92% | not | not |
| M | 8 | 49 | 57 | 86% | sign. | sign. |
| *Social class* | | | | | | |
| High | 9 | 27 | 36 | 75% | | |
| Mid | 3 | 64 | 67 | 96% | not | not |
| Low | 3 | 34 | 37 | 92% | sign. | sign. |
| *Bilingualism* | | | | | | |
| French-dominant | 5 | 62 | 67 | 93% | | |
| Balanced | 3 | 16 | 19 | 84% | not | not |
| English-dominant | 7 | 47 | 54 | 87% | sign. | sign. |
| *Verb* | | | | | | |
| Aller | 12 | 110 | 122 | 90% | not | not |
| S'en aller | 3 | 15 | 18 | 83% | sign. | sign. |
| Total | 15 | 125 | 140 | 89% | input .94 | .94 |

N.B. The 14-19 year-olds were assigned to the social class of their parents and coded as having a secondary level education since they comprised 9th and 12th graders.

Table 2. VARBRUL analysis of *vais* vs *vas* vs *m'as* as auxiliaries

| Factor groups | N and % of *vais* | | N and % of *vas* | | N and % of *m'as* | | Total | Factor effects *vais* | *vas* | *m'as* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Education* | | | | | | | | | | |
| Postsecondary | 21 | 33% | 40 | 63% | 2 | 3% | 63 | .528 | .335 | .137 |
| Secondary | 20 | 16% | 82 | 67% | 20 | 16% | 122 | .310 | .311 | .379 |
| Elementary | 7 | 8% | 52 | 62% | 49 | 41% | 119 | .175 | .275 | .551 |
| *Age* | | | | | | | | | | |
| 55+ | 8 | 9% | 49 | 56% | 31 | 35% | 88 | .234 | .313 | .452 |
| 35-54 | 15 | 19% | 49 | 61% | 16 | 20% | 80 | .458 | .301 | .241 |
| 20-34 | 17 | 19% | 52 | 58% | 20 | 22% | 89 | .197 | .302 | .501 |
| 14-19 | 9 | 19% | 34 | 72% | 4 | 9% | 47 | .469 | .349 | .182 |
| *Sex* | | | | | | | | | | |
| F | 17 | 11% | 116 | 75% | 22 | 14% | 155 | .268 | .466 | .266 |
| M | 32 | 21% | 68 | 46% | 49 | 33% | 149 | .387 | .223 | .390 |
| *Social class* | | | | | | | | | | |
| High | 22 | 33% | 43 | 65% | 1 | 2% | 66 | .559 | .361 | .079 |
| Mid | 12 | 9% | 86 | 62% | 41 | 29% | 139 | .108 | .230 | .662 |
| Low | 15 | 15% | 55 | 56% | 29 | 29% | 99 | .349 | .252 | .399 |
| *Bilingualism* | | | | | | | | | | |
| French-dominant | 16 | 11% | 84 | 55% | 52 | 34% | 152 | .227 | .277 | .496 |
| Balanced | 6 | 15% | 30 | 73% | 5 | 12% | 41 | .271 | .400 | .330 |
| English-dom. | 27 | 24% | 70 | 63% | 14 | 13% | 111 | 517 | .288. | 195 |
| Total | 49 | 16% | 184 | 55% | 71 | 23% | 304 | .173 | .751 | .076 |

Table 3. VARBRUL analysis of *vas* vs *vais* and *m'as* as auxiliaries

| Factor groups | N of *vas* | N of *vais* and *m'as* | Total | % *vas* | Factor effects Step-up | Step-down |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Sex* | | | | | | |
| F | 116 | 39 | 155 | 75% | .65 | .65 |
| M | 68 | 81 | 149 | 46% | .34 | .34 |
| *Education* | | | | | | |
| Postsecondary | 40 | 23 | 63 | 63% | not | not |
| Secondary | 82 | 40 | 122 | 67% | sign. | sign. |
| Elementary | 62 | 57 | 119 | 52% | | |
| *Age* | | | | | | |
| 55+ | 49 | 39 | 88 | 56% | | |
| 35-54 | 52 | 37 | 89 | 58% | not | not |
| 20-34 | 49 | 31 | 80 | 61% | sign. | sign. |
| 14-19 | 34 | 13 | 47 | 72% | | |
| *Social class* | | | | | | |
| High | 43 | 23 | 66 | 65% | not | not |
| Mid | 86 | 53 | 139 | 62% | sign. | sign. |
| Low | 55 | 44 | 99 | 56% | | |
| *Bilingualism* | | | | | | |
| French-dominant | 84 | 68 | 152 | 55% | not | not |
| Balanced | 30 | 11 | 41 | 73% | sign. | sign. |
| English-dominant | 70 | 41 | 111 | 63% | | |
| Total | 184 | 120 | 304 | 61% | input .62 | .62 |

Table 4. VARBRUL analysis of *vais* vs *vas* and *m'as* as auxiliaries

| Factor groups | N of *vais* | N of *vas* and *m'as* | Total | % *vais* | Factor effects Step-up | Step-down |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Sex* | | | | | | |
| F | 17 | 138 | 155 | 11% | .40 | .41 |
| M | 32 | 117 | 149 | 21% | .61 | .60 |
| *Education* | | | | | | |
| Postsecondary | 21 | 42 | 63 | 33% | .75 | not |
| Secondary | 20 | 102 | 122 | 16% | .56 | sign. |
| Elementary | 8 | 111 | 119 | 7% | .30 | |
| *Social class* | | | | | | |
| High | 22 | 44 | 66 | 33% | not | .74 |
| Mid | 12 | 127 | 139 | 9% | sign. | .31 |
| Low | 15 | 84 | 99 | 15% | | .60 |
| *Bilingualism* | | | | | | |
| French-dominant | 16 | 136 | 152 | 11% | not | .38 |
| Balanced | 6 | 35 | 41 | 15% | sign. | .45 |
| English-dominant | 27 | 84 | 111 | 24% | | .68 |
| *Age* | | | | | | |
| 55+ | 8 | 80 | 88 | 9% | | |
| 35-54 | 17 | 72 | 89 | 19% | not | not |
| 20-34 | 15 | 65 | 80 | 19% | sign. | sign. |
| 14-19 | 9 | 38 | 47 | 19% | | |
| Total | 49 | 255 | 304 | 16% | input .14 | .13 |

Table 5. VARBRUL analysis of *m'as* vs *vas* and*vais* as auxiliaries

| Factor groups | N of *m'as* | N of *vas* and *vais* | Total | % m'as | Factor effects Step-up | Step-down |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Sex* | | | | | | |
| F | 22 | 133 | 155 | 14% | .37 | .38 |
| M | 49 | 100 | 149 | 33% | .64 | .62 |
| *Social class* | | | | | | |
| High | 1 | 65 | 66 | 2% | .13 | .07 |
| Mid | 41 | 98 | 139 | 29% | .64 | .73 |
| Low | 29 | 70 | 99 | 29% | .61 | .58 |
| *Education* | | | | | | |
| Postsecondary | 2 | 61 | 63 | 3% | .25 | not |
| Secondary | 20 | 102 | 122 | 16% | .43 | sign. |
| Elementary | 49 | 70 | 119 | 41% | .71 | |
| *Age* | | | | | | |
| 55+ | 31 | 57 | 88 | 35% | | .61 |
| 35-54 | 20 | 69 | 89 | 22% | not | .47 |
| 20-34 | 16 | 64 | 80 | 20% | sign. | .57 |
| 14-19 | 4 | 43 | 47 | 9% | | .25 |
| *Bilingualism* | | | | | | |
| French-dominant | 52 | 100 | 152 | 34% | not | .67 |
| Balanced | 5 | 36 | 41 | 12% | sign. | .40 |
| English-dominant | 14 | 97 | 111 | 13% | | .31 |
| Total | 71 | 233 | 304 | 23% | input .15 | .14 |